New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1945

Volume VI, Number 12. • Yearly Subscription $15.00 • Week of September 17, 1945

1945 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1944 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
*Anna Lucasta	143
*Bell for Adano (A)	65
*Bloomer Girl	118
*Boy Who Lived Twice (A)	177
Catherine Was Great	154
Cherry Orchard (The)	276
Chicken Every Sunday	232
*Dear Ruth	56
Devils Galore	174
Embezzled Heaven	97
*Follow the Girls	222
Hand in Glove	67
*Harvey	95
*I Remember Mama	111
Jacobowsky and the Colonel	243
Laffing Room Only	52
*Late George Apley (The)	77
Mexican Hayride	271
*On the Town	45
Perfect Marriage (The)	104
Sadie Thompson	84
School for Brides	156
Searching Wind (The)	217
Seven Lively Arts	62
Sing Out, Sweet Land	48
Snafu	106
Soldier's Wife	121
*Song of Norway	149
Sophie	50
Ten Little Indians	160
Trio	43

1943 Vol.

Carmen Jones	207
Kiss and Tell	356
*Oklahoma	341
One Touch of Venus	264
Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of September 17, 1945.*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

All Reviews reproduced by permission.

1945 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1945

Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
Alice in Arms	278
And Be My Love	262
Blue Holiday	216
Calico Wedding	259
*Carousel	226
Common Ground	221
Concert-Varieties	200
*Dark of the Moon	252
Deep Mrs. Sykes (The)	246
Firebrand of Florence (The)	241
Foolish Notion	254
Foxhole in the Parlor	210
*Glass Menagerie (The)	234
Good Night Ladies	290
Goose for a Gander (A)	286
Happily Ever After	250
Hasty Heart (The)	298
Hollywood Pinafore	203
Hope for the Best	271
It's a Gift	257
Kiss Them for Me	244
Lady in Danger	240
Lady Says Yes (A)	294
Make Yourself at Home	172
Many Happy Returns	296
*Marinka	186
Memphis Bound	207
Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston	180
Oh, Brother	195
One Man Show	269
Overtons (The)	274
Place of Our Own (A)	232
Rebecca	288
Round Trip	213
Signature	264
Star Spangled Family	230
Stranger (The)	266
Tempest (The)	283
Too Hot for Maneuvers	220
*Up in Central Park	280
*Wind Is Ninety (The)	192

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of September 17, 1945.*

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Devils Galore"
"Make Yourself at Home"
"A Boy Who Lived Twice"
"Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS : : : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"Make Yourself at Home"

NEW YORK TIMES
SEPTEMBER 14, 1945.

Rock Bottom

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"Make Yourself At Home" is about a fading movie star who comes East to do a play. It has a plot and a subplot. The latter concerns the efforts of the star to regain her New York apartment, which she had leased to a fellow living with a cutie in black negligee. The former tells about the play, itself, which is so bad it runs only one night—until someone punches a critic, which naturally starts a stampede at the box-office. The dialogue attached to the subplot is languidly awful; that to the plot sometimes is funny in a reverse way. "Don't actors celebrate after the first night?" asks the cutie. "Not after this one," answers her Popsy. Those remaining throughout the first night at the Barrymore rather liked that.

The one clear thing about "Make Yourself At Home" is that in it Vera Mathews has tossed together the worst play of a very bad week. Bernadene Hayes, as the Hollywood star, is brassy and vigorous, though she might well save her energies for something later in the season. Philip Huston, in the part of her manager, is calm about it all; some of his colleagues apparently have decided that creaming might help, and so they scream. Nothing helps, though. Not even punching a critic could preserve this one.

'MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME.'

Comedy by Vera Matthews; staging by Johnnie Walker; scenery designed by William Noel Saulter; costumes by Janice Wallace; presented at the Biltmore Theater Thursday, September 13, by Albert N. Chapereau and Johnnie Walker. The cast:

Luther Quinn	Donald McClelland
Honeybelle Collins	Bonnie Nolan
Vic Arnold	Phillip Huston
Ray Gilbert	Donald White
Porter	Charles Carol
Dwight Waring	Wm. Valentine
Mona Gilbert	Bernadene Hayes
(Mama) Gilbert	Suzanne Jackson
Ivy	Elizabeth Rver
Ferris Delmar	Robert Carleton
Barney	Grey Stafford
Bob	Robert Nor
Sammy	Lay Nilsen

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
SEPTEMBER 14, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

'Make Yourself at Home' Just Short of the Worst

Members of the audience enjoyed two very hearty laughs last night at the opening performance of "Make Yourself at Home" at the Ethel Barrymore. Unfortunately they were at the expense of the show, which had unwittingly supplied lines of dialog that expressed the majority opinion of those present about the play itself.

A Wall Street potato and his tomato had been to the opening of a Broadway play in which their landlady, a fading Hollywood star, was trying to make a comeback.

Tomato: "Do actresses and actors always celebrate after a first night?"

Potato: "Not after this one."

That, as the saying goes, brought down the house; but its capper not only gave 'em a laugh but also gave 'em an inspiration. It was, "they should have put all those actors out and let us go home."

Not Quite the Record.

"Make Yourself at Home" is not the worst play that ever reached Broadway. There have been many much worse. But it was in there punching for the record. And I'll have to admit it was a game try.

It lost out for the nadirship because the production wasn't in the same class as the script. Specifically there is an excellent set by William Noel Saulter and the cast is above par, with such players as the droll Donald McClelland; Bernadine Hayes, a satiric comedienne of great bounce and considerable range of critical mimicry; Philip Huston, a handsome and accomplished young actor; the veteran Suzanne Jackson; a pretty girl by name Bonnie Nolan, who was formerly an artists' model; and bit players of competence and experience.

Here's the Plot.

The gimcrack has to do with a movie star, who seeks to hypo her weakened popularity by appearance in a Broadway play. She returns to New York with her entourage and, because of the housing shortage, barges in on a broker and his sweetie, to whom she had sublet her apartment. This annoys the broker but delights his moron.

The play proved to be the mess the star's manager argued it would be. The critics roast it. The star is all for retiring when the implausible word comes that the floppo is selling out because of the publicity resulting from battery committed by the star's kid brother upon a drama critic.

The author could shoot every drama critic in town today and it wouldn't help the chances of "Make Yourself at Home" one iota. The audience gave the verdict last night by walking out on it in squadrons.

New York Journal-American
Sept. 14, 1945

Vera Mathews Play Opens at Barrymore

By ROBERT GARLAND

The Broadway boys, who call themselves producers, seem to be under the impression that one bad show deserves another. Well, up to now, in this not-so-bright new season, one bad show has gotten another, believe me. "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" got "A Boy Who Lived Twice." "A Boy Who Lived Twice" got "Devils Galore." And last night at the Ethel Barrymore, "Devils Galore" got "Make Yourself at Home." Phew!

Comparisons being what they are, and "odorous," not "odious," being the correct quotation, suffice it to report that "Make Yourself at Home" is NOT the most meritorious of the new arrivals. "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" had a hint of the Waltz King's music. "A Boy Who Lived Twice" had a provocative premise. "Devils Galore" had a handsome background by Howard Bay. And a comely young newcomer called Tony Eden!

But, last and least, "Make Yourself at Home" has nothing. Even the burlesque bumping-off of my friend and co-worker, George Jean Nathan, doesn't amount to anything. George wasn't shot, as on-stage rumor had it. All George got was a black eye as invisible as Harvey.

* * *

Boy Pokes Critic

Dramatist—all right, pal; but I've got to call her something—Vera Mathews has evidently remembered the historic occasion on which an actress known as Lillian Foster slapped the face of a critic known as Hannen Swaffer and, by so doing, made the theatre pages of the international press. In "Make Yourself at Home," the brother of Mona Gilbert does her slapping for her. "Actress' Brother Slaps Critic" isn't news.

It isn't even a play when heard about, not seen, on the stage in 47th st. Realizing this shortcoming, the playwriting party responsible concocts a sub-plot about apartment shortages on Manhattan; a sub-sub-plot about a manager who falls in love with the lady he's paid to manage; and a sub-sub-sub plot about a play, its author, its leading lady, its leading lady's mother and its reception by the critics.

Its reception by the critics is where George Jean Nathan comes in. You know George! But young Ray Gilbert, who does not know George, rushes around to Twenty-One and pokes him in the eye. Twenty-One is where, on asbestos, George Jean is said to write his after-theatre reviews.

* * *

Bores from Within

The acting, to be nice, is terrible. Benadene Hayes, who took over the leading role when Sally Eilers wisely walked out on it, does a whole lot better than might have been expected. So does Philip Huston, who kids the piece wholeheartedly. And Donald McClelland who, as Luther Quinn, has one-or-two of the two-or-three brighter spots in a heavy-handed and persistently downhill evening's entertainment.

While the evening goes down hill, the members of the cast—all 13 of them—sit here and there in William Noel Saulter's high-class sitting-room and talk and talk and talk. They talk about Mona's two West Coast swimming pools, one for fresh water, one for salt. And how sweet it is to smell the dear old East River again after all the intervening Hollywooden years. And what dastardly so-and-sos the drama critics are...

There're moments when "Make Yourself at Home" turns boldly to self-criticism. "I thought actors always celebrated after their first-nights," one on-stage character remarks. "They're not going to celebrate after this first-night," his fellow-character replies. That second character sure did say a review full. He took the words right out of my mind.

NEW YORK SUN
SEPTEMBER 14, 1945.

'Make Yourself at Home' Is Mercifully Short, Curtain Falling at 10:40.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Hardy playgoers were jolted for the third successive evening with the arrival last night of another transient, "Make Yourself at Home," which found its way into the unsuspecting Barrymore. The new play is a farce comedy, and one of the very worst, but it is mercifully brief. Class was out at 10:40 P. M.

Here's the fable of a movie star coming on from Hollywood for a try at the New York theater and moving with her entourage into her own apartment, notwithstanding the fact that it has been sublet and is occupied by a Wall Street man and his little bundle of trouble from 'way-down-South who calls him Popsie and herself Honeybell. The Hollywood queen opens in her play and it's a flop. But then her kid brother punches a dramatic critic (George Jean Norris) and her screen contract is renewed and her play becomes a hit. All of which might suggest possibilities to the management of "Make Yourself At Home" as a way out of its present dilemma.

Vera Matthews wrote this little gimcrack, Albert N. Chaperau and Johnnie Walker have produced it, and a cast of dismayed and dismaying players go through the motions of acting it. The performances are distressing.

Philip Huston, in the role of the harassed manager of the tempestuous Mona Gilbert, is the best of the lot. As for Miss Bernadene Hayes, who plays the film star, I can only say that I once saw her give a good performance in the melodrama called "Blind Alley" and she is a better actress than she seemed last night on the stage of the Barrymore. Sheer gentleness prevents additional comment on others of the evening's festivities.

"Make Yourself At Home" brings to a close a calamitous week for the town's first-nighters. But don't give up. One of these nights a good play will come to town.

NEW YORK POST
SEPTEMBER 14, 1945

'Make Yourself at Home' A Flop-Within-a-Flop

By Wilella Waldorf

The wearisome spectacle of the waning movie star who finds herself slipping in films and reluctantly deserts her Hollywood mansion (complete with two swimming pools and a soda fountain) to act on the Broadway stage is the subject of "Make Yourself at Home," by Vera Mathews, produced last night at the Barrymore.

No doubt there is material in this familiar situation for a good sardonic comedy, but unless the playwright is an expert in this particular field, it is a dangerous thing to attempt.

By the time the second act had arrived last night, Miss Mathews' witticisms at the expense of Hollywood-on-Broadway were flying back and slapping her in the face like so many wet towels.

Hollywood's Mona Gilbert having decided, against the advice of her manager, to appear on Broadway in a drama called "Seduction," is treated to a set of the worst notices of the season. A large portion of the second act of "Make Yourself at Home" is devoted to uncomplimentary cracks about "Seduction" and its star, and last night's audience, having sat through what went before, was in no mood to be trifled with.

Consequently whenever one of the actors in "Make Yourself at Home" remarked that the cast of "Seduction" should be given a wreath marked "Sympathy," the audience at the Barrymore Theatre applauded with heartfelt abandon.

Even the star's mother was just a wee bit dubious about "Seduction." "The dialogue isn't so good and I don't care much for the plot," she remarked, "but outside of that it's not so bad." This turned out to be the play's best notice.

"Seduction" is about to close after a run of one night when the star's movie-crazed kid brother attacks George Jean Norris, the critic, in front of the 21 Club and gives him a black eye. The resultant publicity causes a line to form at the box-office and Miss Gilbert's studio promptly decides to pick up her option after all.

Even if all of the local critics are beaten up in Times Square today by irate relatives of the producers, we very much doubt if "Make Yourself at Home" will achieve a Broadway run. As for the actors, we are not actually going so far as to send a wreath, but all of them have our deepest sympathy.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
SEPTEMBER 14, 1945

'Make Yourself at Home' Finishes A Disastrous Week of Playgoing

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The week beginning Monday, Sept. 10, 1945, should go into theatrical history books as one of the most disastrous of all time. Three plays have opened and have caused untold suffering.

The third and last play of the week is "Make Yourself at Home," which was presented last night at the Ethel Larrymore Theatre. As a pure horror it is a gem. It is supposed to be a comedy, but very early in the evening the first audience began laughing at it instead of with it, and from then on it was the most exquisite and refined torture.

The story deals with a fading movie star who moves with her several stooges back into her New York apartment, even though the apartment has been sublet to and is being occupied by a paunchy old fool named Popsy and a faintly garnished dish called Honeybelle.

In the play are bits of "Personal Appearance," which was a good comedy about a fading movie star, and "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," which was a good comedy about one of those Southern honeychiles. But there is nothing in the play which is bright, original or funny.

What Comes Off Next?

The only suspense of the evening is in wondering what kind of costume Honeybelle will next be wearing. She comes out first clad in black lace panties and a black lace earlwilson. Subsequently she appears in various gowns addicted to the bare-midriff motif, and always when she walks she waggles enticingly. The actress who has given darn near her all to this role is named Bonnie Nolan.

Among the actors who—for need of a job or from lack of judgment—have submitted themselves to the foolish indignities of "Make Yourself at Home" are Bernadene Hayes, who plays the movie star; Philip Huston, Donald McClelland and Donald White.

The back of the program says that Vera Mathews, the author, went to Beverly Hills High School. Who am I to argue the point?

The back of the program also says that Johnnie Walker, co-producer and director, was once a movie star and that he "believes that folks want to laugh these days—after years of stress—and that 'Make Yourself at Home' will be the forerunner of many stage offerings of a mirth-provoking nature."

If Johnnie's prediction is authoritative you'd better sublet your apartment and get the hell out of town. And I'll go with you. Maybe we all could take some kind of extension course at Beverly Hills High School.

"Make Yourself at Home"—*continued*

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
SEPTEMBER 14, 1945.

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Low Tide

THE only thing hopeful about "Make Yourself at Home" is the fact that it establishes a low which will be very hard to beat for the rest of the season. This Vera Mathews comedy, which opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theater last night, is higgledy-piggledy stagecraft at its worst. While it attempts to make fun of the movies and the theater in some vague sort of way, it merely succeeds in getting a boomerang of ennui.

* * *

Occasionally a lazy critic can quote lines from a play to define its over-all inadequacy. In the case of "Make Yourself at Home" there is no problem. There are scores of lines in a stumbling script about putting on a meretricious stage production which call the turn on this Albert N Chapereau-Johnnie Walker production. It is not this reporter's intent to bore you with them.

* * *

Suffice it to say that Miss Mathews has thought up the not so novel notion of dramatizing a screen star's return to the theater and to an apartment which she had leased to a lecherous moneylender. Even with the latter's inamorata, played by Bonnie Nolan, scampering around the stage in brassiere and panties, it becomes a vacuum of entertainment. Lord deliver the reviewer from more shows such as this!

* * *

Miss Nolan is worth a look-see, in addition to exhibiting an exuberance which is nowhere apparent in the comedy. Bernadene Hayes struggles fitfully with the role of the screen star who has illusions of grandeur and Philip Huston has the really tough part of her long-suffering manager. What they do, under Walker's direction, never becomes significant enough for a second glance at the stage. "Make Yourself at Home" serves only one purpose. It constitutes a low tide of producing and writing ineptitude. Surely the tide will turn.

NEW YORK PM
SEPTEMBER 14, 1945

—Kronenberger—

Black Friday On Broadway

PM Reviews

Something pretty exhausting is going on in the theater this week, even if it's not exactly play production. A kind of Can-You-Top-This contest, with each entry obligated to be a little more ghastly than the previous one. And against odds that you'd think impossible, each exhibit has been winning hands down. But it can't be by accident that there's nothing scheduled to follow *Make Yourself at Home*. *Make Yourself at Home* has the look of the true champ, of the born master. Five minutes after the curtain is up you know that this is vintage sheep-dip, and five minutes later you feel that you've swallowed it.

This lamentable creation at the Barrymore has to do with a movie actress and her entourage who invade the apartment she has leased to a broker and his cutie. The actress goes into a Broadway play called *Seduction*, which is a staggering flop until her brother takes a poke at critic George Jean Norris, one of its more outspoken disparagers, and puts the play over on the ensuing publicity. All this may be intended as prophetic—perhaps the brother of somebody in *Make Yourself at Home* is even now storming into a newspaper office. But I doubt it. It's much more likely that all the brothers will be changing their names than using their mitts.

In any case, it's not the plot of *Make Yourself at Home* that gives it its particular cachet. That derives from the dialogue and by-play, the swift rejoinders and racy epigrams that suggest a dinner-party given by the Jukes for the Kallikaks.

Tied up in these doings are Bernadene Hayes, Philip Huston and a number of others including Bonnie Nolan. Miss Nolan plays the cutie in raiment not suitable for street wear, and is pretty fetching. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"Devils Galore"

New York Journal-American
Sept 13 1945

'Devils Galore' Opens At Royale Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

I'd remark that "Devils Galore" is a hell of a play if I hadn't been urged to lay off the infernal word. Every other professional first-nighter is sure to rush into print with the same trite statement, anyway. So, playing safe, I'll start right out by telling you that the "new comedy" by Eugene Vale which stumbled last night into the Royale had to be seen to be depreciated.

For three dreary acts, for five weary scenes, A Devil — not THE Devil, who was busy bedevilling human beings elsewhere—had himself a time in the handsome offices of Cecil Brock on the 34th floor of a mid-Manhattan skyscraper. Got up to look like W. C Fields, dragging fire and brimstone behind him, he enjoyed himself a good deal more than anybody, on stage or off, enjoyed him.

Met face to face, I've always imagined that a devil would turn out to be a sad, satanic bore. Well, at the Royale and as the featured character in the "new comedy" under consideration, he was. As far as I was concerned, he could have gone back where he came from.

* * *

Girl Meets Devil

Keeping my eyes open last night in 45th st., I gathered that our Cecil Brock was a hellion with the females. No girl, not even Effie Thurston, embryonic young lady-novelist from the great hokum spaces, was safe from his machinations. He, the city slicker, pursued her, the farmer's daughter, all over the 34th floor of that mid-Manhattan skyscraper. In self-defense, she conked him!

But if you think that was the end of "Devils Galore" you're as mistaken as the William Cahn who produced it. The conking of Cecil was merely the beginning. From then on, the lecherous Mr. Brock was sore beset by devils. By A Devil that looked like W. C. Fields and an Assistant Devil that looked like Rex O'Malley. Wagers were made. Effie, the innocent, was the subject of the betting.

After that, the playwright's recollections of "Faust" gave out, as well as the persistence of the players and the patience of the playgoers. After that, it sounded as if somebody else was making it up as the actors went along. After that, came shut-eye.

* * *

Author's Orders

Ernest Cossart, as W. C. Fields pretending to be A Devil, worked faithfully at his chore all evening. But nothing of note came of it. Nothing of note could have. Rex O'Malley, after lurking in the wings, finally appeared disguised but slightly as Atamar, the aforesaid Assistant Devil. He, as well as his superior, trailed fire and brimstone behind him. For no good reason.

George Baxter glowed and glowered—first the one, then the other—as George Baxter, the Faust in modern dress. But Eugene Vale's lines, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's situations and Howard Bay's settings constantly got the best of him. They would have gotten the best of anybody. The others all nine of them, gave out with what the author ordered. It was a waste of time, however. Theirs and yours and mine.

"Devils Galore" was no help, and much hindrance, to the already unhappy season of 1945-1946. And why, I wonder, "galore" in the title? "Galore" means "in abundance," and the devils were only two. From where I sat last night at the Royale, "Fraust" was the funny title called for.

'Devils Galore'

A new comedy by Eugene Vale. Presented by William Cahn last night at the Royale Theatre. Staged by Robert Perry. Setting by Howard Bay. Costumes by Peggy Clark.

THE CAST

Effie Thurston	Tony Eden
Bernie Grant	Michael King
Dr. Aguirra	Harry Sothern
Cecil Brock	George Baxter
Miss Pierce	Betty Kelley
Mrs. Isabel Goodwyn	Jan Cleveland
A Devil	Ernest Cossart
Larry	Paul Byron
Bobbie	John (Red) Kullers
Inspector Brandon	Malcolm Lee Beggs
Atamar	Rex O'Malley
Packey "The Flash" Gurney	Solen Barry

NEW YORK TIMES
SEPTEMBER 13, 1945.

Devilish Nonsense

By LEWIS NICHOLS

The theatre grows more curious. A few hours after it was brooding over the mystery of the soul, it last night turned for subject matter to an old friend, hell. Eugene Vale, as the author of the piece, called up the "Devils Galore," and he deserves to catch every one of them this morning. He has written a play which makes an evening stretch out like a thousand years in another world. It is dull when it is not silly, it is juvenile and flatly farcical, and if Mr. Vale ever does it again, the office Mephisto will snatch away his typewriter. The devils have been libeled.

Inspired by what must be his darker mood, the author is telling of a literary agent who finds time on the side to be a notable seducer. He is killed and a devil makes a pact with him; he is to get another fortnight on earth in which to defrost innocence. Since he is unable to do this, the devil himself takes over the pursuit—and ends by apparently falling in love with the girl. It may be that love is too strong a word, for the devil is an old fellow, and possibly he is just being nice to a playwright. At any rate the girl marries the boy from back home, the agent starts on his downward travels and the devil goes to heaven. Whether they will accept such a sentimental bungler up there is not disclosed.

Any east howling down such a wind naturally finds the effort too much. Sufficient that Ernest Cossart looks not too cheerful about his antics as the visitor from subterranean suburbs, and a fair number of the others seem a little disturbed about something. Tony Eden is pretty as the girl but the part is no test of her acting and Rex O'Malley is amusing for a short time as an associate friend. There are a good many explosions in the course of the evening, as hell yields up actors and then sucks them back again; a not too distant explosion probably will mean that "Devils Galore" has gone away, too.

NEW YORK POST
SEPTEMBER 13, 1945

'Devils Galore' a Modern Morality Play With Fireworks

By Wilella Waldorf

Eugene Vale, author of "Devils Galore," is under the impression that every time a sinner dies in Manhattan he or she is personally escorted to hell by a devil sent for that express purpose. This would seem to be an unnecessary display of courtesy on the part of Satan, but since Mr. Vale appears to be uncommonly well informed on the subject, we shall not venture to argue about it.

"Devils Galore" was revealed in sundry puffs of smoke last night at the Royale Theatre, and it will doubtless disappear one of these evenings just as suddenly, leaving nothing in its wake but a faint odor of sulphur.

Mr. Vale presents his modern morality play in the office of a wolfish publisher named Cecil Brock, who lures pure young maidens with literary ambitions into his sanctum with base promises that he will read their manuscripts. The maidens are always from out of town, since Mr. Vale is convinced there is no purity left in New York.

This time when Mr. Brock locked the door and made the customary advances, Effie Thurston of Greenville, S. C., hit him neatly over the head with a lamp, whereupon Effie prudently departed and a Devil in the form of Ernest Cossart, of all people, arrived to escort Cecil below.

At this point the plot became so complicated that it escaped us entirely. All we remember before passing out in a puff of smoke is that Mr. Cossart had to stay on in the guise of Cecil's brother, Leslie Brock, and that he was supposed to be spending a lively fortnight seducing Effie, on Satan's command.

Precisely why Effie had to be seduced also escapes us, but anyway this ingenious arrangement gave Mr. Vale an opportunity to bring in an immense number of puns and jokes, most of them hinging on the fact that Leslie Brock was really a Devil, though not a soul knew it except some of the other actors and the audience.

Oh, yes, the stage-hands knew it too. They had to fix up an amazing number of flares and smoke effects, and whenever the plot became so abstruse that even the author couldn't think of a way out, all lights were extinguished and a couple of shots fired from the wings.

This went on until twenty minutes before 11 in a handsome Howard Bay setting (with real books) and it is probably the most appallingly juvenile endeavor in the theatrical line that we shall be called upon to sit before this season. At least let's hope there isn't anything sillier in the offing.

Ernest Cossart, who must have been very eager indeed to get back from Hollywood, is a nice old party and it's pleasant to see him again. Rex O'Malley, George Baxter, Michael King and Harry Sothern were among the others involved in the fireworks display, while the role of Effie, the pure girl, was played by Tony Eden, a pretty blonde who is Walter Winchell's daughter.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
SEPTEMBER 13, 1945

'Devils Galore' Is an Empty Bore Despite Help of Ernest Cossart

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Something new has been added to the theatrical scene this week. Army lads, equipped with minicams, speedguns and extension lights have been infiltrating first-nighters and shooting when they see the reds of their eyes. It may be that these young historians are compiling a documentary for Capt. Garson Kanin or Maj. Kenneth Mac Kenna—a documentary on the horrors of peace.

Or, perhaps, they are on assignment from Sergt. Leo Hofeller, the picture boss of the best of all magazines, Yank, to get a morale-building layout designed to soothe the nostalgia of such troops in Europe and the Orient who wish they could be on Broadway just for once.

The photographers and this reporter last night drew the assignment to cover the premiere of "Devils Galore," a comedy by Eugene Vale, at the Royale Theatre. They were busier than I was because they had to get some pictures and all I had to do was sit and watch the play. Since very little took place on the stage my job was a comparative cinch. I was like the reporter assigned to a wedding who phoned his boss there was no story because the bridegroom didn't show up.

Satiric Idea, Anyhow.

There might have been a play in "Devils Galore," but it didn't appear. Mr. Vale's idea was, one supposes, satiric. A devil—one of Satan's underlings—comes to claim the soul of a recent, defunct New York literary agent, and finds that New Yorkers are so far ahead of him in devilment that he is saintly by comparison—so de ent, in fact, that he gets a bid f m St. Peter to come on upstairs.

But the comedy lacks the necessary sophistication and depends for its humor upon endless puns about the devil and hell—like there being hell to pay or having a devil of a time. The author seems to be a Johnny One-Note and it's a hell of a note.

Since it is impossible for Ernest Cossart to give a bad performance even when he has nothing much to perform, his impersonation of the emissary from the netherland has qualities of jauntiness and intelligence. George Baxter plays the literary agent who has just been killed with enough suave lechery to earn 10% of almost any writer's income. Rex O'Malley appears occasionally as an assistant devil who seems to have stopped off at a Broadway magic store and bought about $4 worth of tricks.

In the plot the literary agent, who has just been bashed in the head by a struggling young authoress, is given two more weeks of life by the devil. In this time he must seduce the authoress, who is a very pure girl from Greenville, and thus make her soul available for hell. Tony Eden, a very handsome young lady, is the authoress, and she reverses parental precepts by comporting herself with modesty and charm.

NEW YORK PM
SEPTEMBER 13, 1945

——*Kronenberger*——

A Play That Slanders Hell

PM Reviews

The supernatural is on a rampage this week; Tuesday night, in *A Boy Who Lived Twice*, a couple of guys died and then came back having swapped souls; last night devils were bounding about the stage of the Royale. But the supernatural is certainly not getting anywhere in the popularity polls. Tuesday night's exhibit was decidedly bad, and last night's was downright awful.

The plot of *Devils Galore* is even more confused and confusing than that of *A Boy Who Lived Twice*, but I'm not going to try to prove it. Sufficient that this one is about a rakish publisher who gets bopped into eternity by a young lady he is trying to make, is forthwith claimed by one of Satan's satellites, and gets a new lease on life by offering to help snare the pure young thing for the Devil. After that the stage gets cluttered with a second devil, a diabolist, a detective, a bookie and two unbearable lady authors, in a kind of double feature concerned with tempting the young lady's virtue and tracing the publisher's murderer. Lights go out, guns go off, puns go off (things like "Oh, the heaven with you"), and now and then somebody in the audience goes quietly mad. Oh, yes, and when Hell is on the wire smoke rises out of the telephone.

George Baxter plays the publisher, Tony Eden is the young girl, Ernest Cossart is one of the devils, and Rex O'Malley is the other. Mr. O'Malley seemed to me to be trying at times to outdo the author, but the others were blameless if baffled, and Miss Eden was refreshing to look at.

There's another play tonight, and the way things are going it will probably concern a veal chop that turns out to be Marie Antoinette.—Louis Kronenberger

NEW YORK SUN
SEPTEMBER 13, 1945.

'Devils Galore,' Which Combines Fantasy With Realism, Is Quite Hopeless.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Broadway's little surprise package of last night was "Devils Galore," a mixture of realism and fantasy, brought into the Royale Theater by the eager but imprudent William Cahn. It is a forlorn and dreadfully cluttered exhibit and is quite hopeless as theater fare.

This is a play about the bargain the Devil makes with a wanton young man who has attempted to seduce a pretty and innocent girl and Ernest Cossart, absent from the local stage for some years, returns to portray this Devil, who is both elderly and benevolent. But the theaterwise Cossart does little with or for the part. And the play is far beyond his or any other actor's saving.

Eugene Vale is the author of this misfit at the Royale. The Devil appears just after the sleek and sinister Cecil Brock has been cracked over the head with a lamp, swung by the embryonic girl novelist. The dead man makes the proposition that if allowed two more weeks of life he will produce the soul of the girl. The Devil agrees, takes human form for the allotted time, and when Brock is ruled out by a technicality the Devil proceeds to take over the girl's seduction on his own account. He doesn't succeed and it's his discovery before the adventure ends that life among humans can be more than a little irksome. As for the scoundrel Brock, it remains for Packey (the Flash) Gurney to finish him off.

The story is told to the accompaniment of smoking telephones, blackouts, pistol shots, explosions and assorted Satanic trickeries. There are many heavy-handed attempts at whimsy and philosophy. There is an endless flow of flat dialogue. And there is a flatfoot present in the person of a police inspector who seems to have come direct from an old cops and robbers melodrama by Willard Mack.

Now, in the paragraph generally reserved for the actors, be it recorded that Tony Eden is pretty and appealing and is to be regarded as an ingenue of genuine promise. She has a great deal of charm and poise. Rex O'Malley tries to wring some comedy from the role of a prankful assistant Devil. George Baxter has the seducer's role. Betty Kelley, new to this department, brings a sharp delivery to a minor part. Howard Bay's setting is expensive and flashy—and it's wasted.

"Devils Galore" won't do. Season's score to date: Three up, three out.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
SEPTEMBER 13, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

Fine Cast Does Its Best with Dull 'Devils Galore'

"Devils Galore," by Eugene Vale, which opened at the Royale last night, is a very flaccid rewriting of Ben Hecht's movie allegory, "The Scoundrel" in terms of farce. Though handsomely mounted and enacted, on the whole, by a talented and ingratiating cast, it doesn't add up to anything, either as farce or as allegory. As farce, it is neither funny nor witty; as allegory, it is too simple-minded for adult enjoyment.

The cast, headed by the always dependable and likable Ernest Cossart, is, with one exception, an excellent one. First, there is the lovely Tony Eden, who is making her debut in a straight play. She is an ingenue of high promise, sweet without saccharinity, ingenuous but with a sense of humor, altogether an intelligent and resourceful young actress whose career will be worth watching.

Then there are: Rex O'Malley, a comedian of many subtle (as well as sure-fire) resources; George Baxter, who can wolf it with the best of them in his age classification; Betty Kelley, who is cut to order for the sort of roles that used to be cut to order for Jane Dixon; Solen Burry, the Diogenes of 44th St., remembered from "Cafe Crown" and "Having a Wonderful Time," etc.; Harry Sothern, nephew of the great E. H., last seen here in a cockney bit part in "Sheppey" and prior to that in "The Wookey; Michael King, an agreeable juvenile; and Jean Cleveland, a buxom female comic.

Cast Strengthens Play.

Robert Perry, who staged the show, has been unfair to Malcolm Lee Beggs. With the others he has taken care to bring out the best they have to give with the shoddy material at hand. He has neglected Mr. Beggs and let him mug it without restraint. Mr. Beggs is of the huff-and-puff school of acting, with much harumphing for grace notes. He should be reminded that he is no longer the cuckoo Teddy in "Arsenic and Old Lace," for his own future good.

As in "The Scoundrel," a predatory publisher, whose interest in literature is solely in the advantages it gives in the pursuit of young innocence, attempts to seduce a small-town girl—who has written what is obviously (from her description of it) a very bad movie—the moment she comes into his office. She, presently realizing that he has designs on her virtue, whangs him over the head with a table lamp and rushes out.

Hocus-Pocus.

In falling the publisher's head is split open by the sharp edge of a marble step. But after his corpse has been photographed for the police and the newspapers one of Satan's envoys arrives to give him a few days' grace as a mortal, for the aid the publisher might give in a real triumph of evil—that of corrupting an innocent girl. There is a lot of listless hocus-pocus whereby Satan's envoy (Mr. Cossart) is finally discharged for inefficiency, because he develops a fatherly interest in the girl and sees to it that she gets properly married to her true love.

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
SEPTEMBER 13, 1945.

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Refugees From Hades

EVEN granting that "Devils Galore" has a cute idea, which this reporter is not prepared to do, there is scant defense for what has been perpetrated at the Royale. This supposedly comic dramatic fable about evil spirits wrestling for the soul of an innocent young girl is as crumby as a piece of striesel cake. The acting is as labored as the script. The jests are as pointless as the pretentious appointments which grace the production. All in all it is a piece of contrived bladerdash which should scare any witness away from theatrical fantasy for all time.

* * *

Eugene Vale, the author of the piece, has pretended that Satan's henchmen are lurking around, ready to bring dead men back to life, invest mortal forms and raise merry hell in general. The devils trot out on the stage of the Royale, but they create very little merriment, even when they explode occasionally. There is an obvious satirical motif in the play, as it propounds the thesis that even the fire and brimstone boys can't take present-day living in New York, but it is as muted as a piano without any strings.

* * *

Even Ernest Cossart, who is no mean actor when he is given a chance to ply his trade, has a rugged session in "Devils Galore." When, as the chief satanic advocate, he is asked to make another quip about hell, after an interminable three acts of this sort of thing, you are likely to suffer as well as sympathize with him. There are so few sparks of genuine comedy in the piece that it might have been better had Vale resorted to rubbing a couple of sticks together. Tony Eden is rather attractive as the youngster who causes the rumpus, but she is at her best when she ignores the comedy and merely poses prettily.

* * *

As for Rex O'Malley, he struts aroundas the most vicious of the devils without ever succeeding in being anything more than ridiculous. His account of an attempted seduction in which he winds up with a feminine psycho-analyst is downright painful. Harry Soth ern waggles a prop beard in the parts of a student of Satanism, George Baxter tries hard to be as vicious on earth as he is about to become in hell and Michael King is highly confused in what passes for a romantic lead. You must have gathered by now whom I would nominate to take "Devil's Galore."

"A Boy Who Lived Twice"

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
SEPTEMBER 12, 1945.

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Why?

THE psyche is being intimately probed at the Biltmore, where "A Boy Who Lived Twice," opened last night. It is quite an operation, involving hypnosis, a double zombie act and a hint of incest. The single zombie you will find on stage gives the cue to the preposterous nonsense in the show when he comes way down center front and says "I have an awful feeling of impending disaster." The disaster occurred when the curtain rang up.

* * *

For there is almost nothing pleasant to report about this new entry in the autumn theatrical sweepstakes. Several of the actors and actresses fumble through their lines valiantly, but it merely adds to the general confusion of the piece. Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby, who take credit for the dramatic nonesuch, have taken a big metaphysical plunge. From any standpoint of stage artistry or entertainment, it is a whopping belly-flop.

* * *

The thesis of their work, if it may be so dignified, is that disembodied spirits go prowling around and jumping into other anatomies. In this instance a Long Island playboy gets killed taking a dangerous jump on his favorite filly at the same time that a Mid-West pilot crashes in a take-off. The sister of the former falls in love with the spirit of the latter and it is only after a famous psychiatrist discovers that they were identical twins that everything is hunky-dory. If that is not a very clear synopsis of "A Boy Who Lived Twice," go and see it yourself.

* * *

To the credit of the players, they sustain a certain macabre suspense for a lot longer than one might have anticipated. Claire Windsor flutters around as the invalid mother of the playboy, but she might better have been in a silent movie. John Heath takes on the back-breaking role of the fellow who is at once Phil and John and doesn't know whether he is in love with his sister or lives in Illinois. He is badly bent at the finish. Anne Sargent has considerable sincerity and distinction in the sister role and Vaughan Glaser emotes powerfully as the witch doctor. The best acting in the world would serve "A Boy Who Lived Twice" to little purpose. It is merely a dramatic disaster.

A Boy Who Lived Twice.'

By Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby; staged by Paul Foley; setting by John Root; presented by Hall Shelton at the Biltmore Theater, Sept. 11, with the following cast:

Ellen Blake	Cecil Elliott
Braxton	Stapleton Kent
Nancy Hastings	Anne Sargent
Randall Hastings	Grandon Rhodes
Martha Hastings	Claire Windsor
Dr. Cecil Blake (Dockaby)	W. O. McWatters
Philip Hastings	John Heath
Anne Cunningham	Streisa Leeds
Dr. Brouletta	Vaughan Glaser
Mother	Nellie Burt

NEW YORK SUN
SEPTEMBER 12, 1945.

'A Boy Who Lived Twice,' Done at Biltmore, Tangled and Tiresome Drama.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The exercises at the Biltmore last evening were on the laborious side. "A Boy Who Lived Twice," a play of metempsychosis, presented by Hall Shelton, is a tangled and incredibly tiresome drama and it is burdened by some early season acting that would not have been more than passable on the summer theater circuit.

The authors, Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby, have plunged into psychical research and have gone extensively into the subject of transference of identity after death, but they have put their thoughts into an inexpert and befuddled play. There were moments when "A Boy Who Lived Twice" seemed a clumsy variation of "Here Comes Mr. Jordan."

In the Biltmore's new play the neurotic Philip Hastings dies from a fall from a horse and his body is taken over by the identity of Lieut. John Ralston. There then ensues an evening of debate as to whether the principal character in the Egbert-Tubby drama is Philip or John and long before the play ends you have ceased to care. The authors bring on a clash between men of medicine in the matter of diagnosis; they introduce something of a romance between their tormented young man and the girl who is the sister of Philip, and at the finish, when the play really gets out of control, there is a revelation of complications and misfortune at birth.

John Heath has a strenuous evening playing the young man with the body of Philip and the mind and memories of John. Vaughan Glaser, an actor of considerable renown in the stock-companied America that used to be, plays the psychiatrist and is slow and old-fashioned in method, but he keeps you listening to him.

Claire Windsor, prominent in the films before they began to talk, is quite fragile as the mother of Philip and reveals rather an inexperience as a stage actress. Anne Sargent, W. O. McWatters and Streisa Leeds are others of the distressed household. John Root has designed a nice setting. The staging is by Paul Foley.

The drama slips again, and badly, in "A Boy Who Lived Twice."

"A Boy Who Lived Twice"—*continued*

NEW YORK TIMES
SEPTEMBER 12, 1945

Restless Souls

By LEWIS NICHOLS

The conscious and subconscious, the soul and the attending psychiatrist, gamboled like a flock of happy lambs at the Biltmore last evening. The event was the opening of "A Boy Who Lived Twice," an event which followed seven years' preparation, or enough to build a bridge over the river or a tunnel under—elsewhere. Hall Shelton probably deserves an award for perseverance, although the biblical figure who worked seven years for a wife got the wrong one, and the play he produced also must deserve a prize of some sort. Seldom so early in the season has there been so wacky an evening, seldom one as confused.

"A Boy Who Lived Twice" is about the soul. Two young men die at roughly the same time and their souls change bodies and both come to life again. The late Thorne Smith might have made something of it, but Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby get into a serious discussion. A psychiatrist is called in to find out what is going on; one of the visiting souls falls in love with his body's sister and everyone agrees that for the looks of the thing they must stay asunder. The authors of the play speak grandly in flowing phrases, which, to be sure, add a good deal to the unconscious geniality of the evening. Their next play should be put on without seven years' delay.

With every right to be troubled by what they are saying, the players act for the most part with an air of stubborn earnestness. Vaughan Glaser is the psychiatrist and Claire Windsor the mother of one young man who has the soul of another. John Heath plays the double identity as though he were a bit frightened of the whole thing; Anne Sargent is attractive as the sister. Paul Foley has directed woodenly, but John Root, who could stick to realism and avoid the other world, has drawn up a fair-enough setting. "The Boy Who Lived Twice" is double jeopardy of a sort rare in the theatre. No, no, quick, like that.

NEW YORK PM
SEPTEMBER 12, 1945

—*Kronenberger*—

Slightly On The Queer Side

PM Reviews

As I remember, it was Thomas Henry Huxley who was held up to us in college as a supreme master of exposition, and I frankly wish he could return from beyond the grave to try his hand at setting forth the plot of *A Boy Who Lived Twice*. (In view of that plot, moreover, there's no reason why he shouldn't be able to swing it.) For Mr. Egbert and Mrs. Tubby have churned up something that my own somewhat wayward prose cannot hope to synopsize, a truly buggy work that must be seen to be believed—not that even then any one would believe it. Even so, the mere incredibility of it is as nothing compared to the confusion.

Well . . . young Philip Hastings is carried home after a hunting accident and pronounced dead by a doctor. But his mystical sister Jeane keeps communing with him and pulls him back to life. He returns, however, insisting that he is Lt. John Ralston, who has just died in a plane crash. Philip-John, as we'd better call him, is in quite a fix, suddenly faced with a family and fiancee he doesn't know or want. A psychiatrist is summoned and, after hypnotizing the boy, becomes convinced that he *is* John Ralston. At this point, or maybe it's a bit later on, a Mrs. Ralston bobs up from Illinois to announce that her son John, killed in a plane crash, has also been revived and insists he is Philip Hastings.

* * *

So far, I grant, the plot is exceedingly simple. It's only now that things get a little complicated and odd, when Philip-John falls in love with Jeane, and John-Philip disappears out in the corn belt, and Philip-John has to be yanked back from death by Jeane a second time at what turns out to be the precise moment that John-Philip commits suicide, and P-J feels in consequence that he has murdered J-P, and it later transpires that the boys were really twins, the offspring of Mr. and Mrs. Ralston, only Mr. Hastings swiped one of them in the hospital after his wife's baby had died. According to the psychiatrist, a couple of dead grown-ups can quite logically come back to life and exchange personalities provided they were originally twins and you believe in the soul. A few weeks ago I might have wanted to ask the psychiatrist a question or two on this point, but since the atomic bomb came in I'm keeping my trap shut.

All this does sort of keep you wondering what will come next and how it will all be straightened out; and if Mr. Egbert and Mrs. Tubby had any dramatic sense they might have cooked up a weird but fascinating evening, a sort of inspired mess, that had everybody in the audience flirting with death on the chance that they might be resuscitated as John D. Rockefeller or Hedy Lamarr. But our authors are as dull in one sense as they are daring in another, having everybody talk at length and not very brightly, so that the whole thing flops as a curio. Nor are the casting and direction much help. John Heath plays Philip-John (John-Philip never appears) rather prosaically considering all he's been through; Vaughan Glaser is terribly solemn as the psychiatrist; and Claire Windsor, Anne Sargent and Strelsa Leeds, as mother, sister and fiancee, go about their business adequately, but giving no impression of being involved in so highly unprecedented a state of affairs. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

NEW YORK POST
SEPTEMBER 12, 1945

A Youth Who Couldn't Keep Body and Soul Together

By Wilella Waldorf

"A Boy Who Lived Twice," produced at the Biltmore Theatre last night, is apparently a serious attempt to deal with psychic phenomena on the stage. The authors, it is reported, have based their play on actual case histories known to psychiatrists, and they are dealing with a fascinating subject.

But while they may have selected as the basis of their plot an occurrence that is not beyond the bounds of possibility, their play-writing is not sufficiently adept or forceful to convince an audience bound to be skeptical of something it does not understand.

In their efforts to pile on the drama, they have succeeded only in turning "A Boy Who Lived Twice" into sheer farce.

The story, at least in the beginning, is not without interest. Philip Hastings, a highly-strung, rather spoiled young man whose parents live comfortably at Oyster Bay, L. I., is injured in a fall from his horse, and dies shortly afterward on the living room davenport. At least the family physician, who happens to be on the spot, pronounces him dead. But later on he suddenly moves, comes to life and seems perfectly fit.

Physically, in fact, he is unhurt. But mentally — well, the doctor, unable to think of anything else, diagnoses amnesia due to a crack on the head. For Philip insists he isn't Philip Hastings at all, but Lieut. John Ralston of the Army Air Forces, stationed at an air field near Holyoke, Mass.

A noted psychiatrist is called in, and it develops that a Lieut. John Ralston of the Army Air Forces died in a plane crash at the same time Philip fell off his horse, subsequently came to life and insisted he was not John Ralston but Philip Hastings.

The play does not attempt to cover the Holyoke end, viewing the phenomenon strictly from the Hastings living room, but there is a Comedy of Errors touch to the situation that only a first-class dramatist could control. And the authors of "A Boy Who Lived Twice" are far from masters of the craft.

The complications that follow are too numerous and too confused to go into here, but by the time the third act arrives, the soul of Lieut. John Ralston has fallen in love with Philip Hastings' sister and she with him. All of which is a trifle bewildering, since it's Philip's body that's on the premises, while Philip's soul has just killed John Ralston's body up in Holyoke.

Just before the final curtain, the psychiatrist was trying to prove that Philip wasn't a Hastings after all, or something of the kind, but by this time we had given up trying to follow the psychic quirks of the plot and had taken to wondering if the Army Air Forces would actually allow a civilian body to wear a Lieutenant's uniform just because the Lieutenant's soul happened to be occupying a civilian body at the moment. Something tells us it's against regulations.

John Heath played the title role well enough to keep most of the audience from giggling except under extreme provocation. Vaughan Glaser brought a certain gruff authority to the role of the psychiatrist, and Claire Windsor of the films fluttered about now and then looking just as she used to look in the silent movies, and also sounding much the same. Nellie Burt came on in the second act for a nice bit.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
SEPTEMBER, 12, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

'A Boy Who Lived Twice' Fails as Psychic Tale

"A Boy Who Lived Twice," by Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby, which opened at the Biltmore last night, is such a serious and earnest play that it is a pity that seriousness and earnestness are not satisfactory substitutes for dramatic art, intelligence and imagination.

The trouble with this psychic melodrama, paradoxically enough is that it probably is a close approximation to the testimony concerning a strange psychiatric case which the authors once knew about, at least at second hand, and that they have tried to be as literal as possible in dealing with it.

If they had read Edgar Allen Poe with care or had studied Arthur Machen's "Hieroglyphics," they would not have made this very serious mistake. They would have learned that, whereas in real life it is desirable to exhaust every rational explanation of a puzzling phenomenon, in art all themes dealing with the metaphysical or the supernatural must be in terms of hint and suggestion, leaving the reader, or the playgoer to interpret the phenomena in accordance with his own equipment in the way of imagination, logic and susceptibility to suggestion.

A New Soul.

The play tells of a neurotic youth who is pronounced dead after he has been thrown from a horse. His sister, who is established as a girl of unusual perceptions and intuitions, asks to be left alone with the body. Then she simply asks her brother to come back to her.

The body is thereby reanimated. But it is no longer inhabited by the same mind, the same soul or the same storage of memories. The body is that of Philip Hastings but the personality is that of John Ralston, a flight lieutenant whose plane crashed at the same instant that Philip was thrown from his horse. Philip had never known a John Ralston, yet his reanimated body can recall nothing else except the experiences, the home life, the being, of John Ralston.

A psychiatrist is called in. He hypnotizes the Philip who insists he is John, in an effort to get at the subconscious cause of this hallucination, or what the phychiatrist believes, at first, is an hallucination. This produces no results. The psychiatrist is then himself convinced that some strange psychic mystery is being unfolded here, and that (since it turns out that in a small Illinois town a flight lieutenant named John Ralston has shown up after a crash apparently suffering from the delusion that he is Philip Hastings) there has been some celestial sleight-of-hand performed whereby the two souls were restored to the wrong bodies.

Hard to Believe.

This is asking too much of human credulity, especially when presented rather awkwardly on the stage. Quite a few last night gave notice of their skepticism by irreverent outbursts of laughter at places where the authors' intentions were far from being humorous. Having exhausted most of the possible explanations of the case, the authors offered their own, which is an anticlimax of naivete.

It is the authors' private conviction that twins not only possess identical souls but identical sets of memory impressions, though they be separated at birth and brought up in entirely different environments. They disclose, at the end, that Philip is really the twin of John Ralston and that, as a baby, he had been substituted for a Hastings baby that had been born dead. Thus, in their simple, unimaginative way, the authors legitimatize the romantic love that has sprung up between Jeanne Hastings (Anne Sargent) and "John Ralston" (Grandon Rhodes) which people might otherwise consider an abhorrent attraction.

It is nice to see Claire Windsor in a Broadway play and to have Vaughan Glaser back with us even though their stay seems destined to be brief.

New York Journal-American
Sept. 12, 1945

Reincarnation Theme Of Biltmore Arrival

By ROBERT GARLAND

I'm here to tell you that "A Boy Who Lived Twice" started off last night at the Biltmore with a premise that was not at all uninteresting. Dealing, as it did, with the exchange of personalities—a theme as old as Aeschylus, as new as Cora Garrett, and dear to the hearts of Gilbert and Sullivan—it wandered aimlessly away into the jungles of Jung, the forests of Freud and the marshes of melodrama.

Especially into the marshes of melodrama. I have small doubt that Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby, the many-named dramatists who signed the document on display in W. 47th st., set their "A Boy Who Lived Twice" on a firm foundation of careful research and even more careful documentation. But, on top of this, they neglected to construct a play. A play that wasn't jerry-built, I mean.

For, despite the admitted firmness of its foundation, "A Boy Who Lived Twice" fell gradually —all too gradually for the assembled congregation—to pieces during the course of its first New York performance. As one of the characters went out of his way to remark, we had a "most awful feeling of impending disaster." The disaster materialized.

• • •

Twists and Turns

Even if I wanted to, even if you wanted me to, I couldn't begin to tell you the story of "A Boy Who Lived Twice" in the space allotted to a morning-after theatre review. After getting under way with the premise that was not at all uninteresting, its narrative twists and turns were those of a corkscrew — although the twists and turns of a corkscrew have, I am told, been known to come to a more stimulating conclusion!

Last night, at the Biltmore, one civilian, Philip Hastings of Long Island, died under his own name and came almost immediately to life as, if I caught the name correctly, another Lt. John Rawlston of the AAF. Not being himself exactly, this Philip-John puzzled his father-who-was-not-his-father, hurt his mother-who-was-not-his-mother and almost, but not quite, married his sister-who-was-not-his sister. Puzzling, eh? It sure was!

Frankly, I'm not the least bit sure what happened to our double-exposed hero at the final curtain's fall. But I do seem to remember that Philip-John—or John-Philip—went away with his sister-who-was-not-his-sister, leaving a stage full of frustrated families and an auditorium full of confounded customers.

• • •

Impending Disaster

Neither the acting of the actors nor the direction of the director rose to the rescue of Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby, the many-named dramatists responsible in the first place for "A Boy Who Lived Twice." From Vaughan Glaser, who was at the top of the "Who's Who in the Cast" in programs at the Biltmore, to Nellie Burt, who was at the bottom, the mummery was no more than the playwrights asked for.

Only Strelsa Leeds, as Philip-John's fiancee-who-was-not-his-fiancee, soared above the dialogue and its director. It was she who, remembering all she had learned from Philadelphia's Jasper Deeter and New York's Academy of Dramatic Arts, exclaimed to her defaulting lover: "You do not come from Illinois; you come straight from hell!" There and then, I'm sure, her fellow on-stage character suffered his "most awful feeling of impending disaster"...

So, following its natural bent, September continues to bring show-pieces that are infrequently good, frequently bad and occasionally indifferent. I'll not be surprised if the Biltmore is all ready and waiting the "Therese" which is pencilled in for early October. Last night's lad who lived twice had a mistaken lust for survival.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
SEPTEMBER 12, 1945

'A Boy Who Lived Twice' Exists Much Too Long at the Biltmore

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "A Boy Who Lived Twice" one lad is in a plane crash and another one falls off a horse and both of them die, but before you can get out of the Biltmore Theatre they have come alive again. Much to their surprise and to my infinite distress they have switched bodies, moved into strange homes and fallen afoul of some of the weirdest doctors since the man who first thought of curing warts with dead cats.

This play—"A Boy Who Lived Twice"—was presented last night at the Biltmore Theatre by Hall Shelton. The authors are Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby.

The boy who falls off the horse is named Philip Hastings. He is out on swanky, mosquito-ridden, playwright-harried Long Island, and, talking about his horse just before the fatal ride, he says, "I'll put her through the paces after tea."

He gets fatal injuries after tea, and when they bring him into a living room designed by John Root he dies. Then he comes to life—but now he is John Ralston, the fellow who got killed in the plane crash, only nobody will believe he is John Ralston. Even I won't.

This is irksome to this Long Island zombie. He is among strangers who believe they are his relatives, and the situation is, to put it mildly, befuddling. So he toys with the idea of suicide. A girl in the play says this is awful, because if he commits suicide he may be freeing himself but he will be murdering John Ralston.

If you have read this far you are thoroughly confused, but it's only the beginning. There must have been more because the play was still going on when I left. It is a sample of the bad writing, bad direction and bad acting which the New York theatre will offer when it thinks nobody is looking.

"Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
SEPTEMBER 7, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

'Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston' Achieves Some New Lows

The best thing about "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston," a new musical which opened the season at the Century last night, is that the agony is over before 11 o'clock, and the show lasts less than two hours of playing time. It would be much better if it lasted only thirty minutes.

Thirty minutes would give the customers a chance to hear Jay Martin, a melodious tenor in a couple of songs; watch Harold Lang, an excellent dancer, do an eccentric soft shoe specialty and perform in semiclassical ballet style in a number with Babs Heath, and again in another number with Margit Dekova and corps de ballet; allow Virginia MacWatters to do her tricky-voiced "Laughing Waltz"; and still leave time for a flip musical number by the cute Florence Sundstrom.

Scarcely a Laugh.

The other hour and 30 minutes of the show is a bore and a pretty stupid one. Even the Johann Strauss music takes an awful beating at the hands of Robert Stolz and George Lessner, who did the orchestrations, and again at the hands of Mr. Stolz who conducted the orchestra. The familiar Strauss Waltzes, including "The Blue Danube" are played without fire or feeling.

The lyrics by Robert Sour are witless; but the book by Leonard L. Levinson is simply atrocious, vulgar, cheap and smutty. I am happy to report that Mr. Levinson's attempts at comedy got almost no laughs, and even the few accorded them were weak and somewhat embarrassed.

It is hard to believe, but Mr. Levinson's first gag of the evening was one which the unfortunate Ralph Dumke (a good actor and a good singing comic, when he is given decent work to do), had to emit: "What has he (Johann Strauss), got that I haven't got?" Mr. Levinson's comedy inspiration lagged for a long time after that great effort until it came alive again in a very unfunny drunk scene in Strauss' hotel bedroom, where the composer's American promoter, the latter's financial backer, and a Boston Brahmin are awaiting the lion's return.

Typical Dialog.

Mr. Dumke: "Boston is so crowded with visitors who want to see Strauss that I had to sleep in a stable."

Sydney Grant: "Did you get a private stall?"

Mr. Dumke: "No; I had to crowd in with the horses and asses."

The diminutive comic, Edward J. Lambert, was in an even unhappier case than Mr. Dumke. He had to give vent to some sour attempts to be smutty that were so stupid you can hardly believe they were thought up by someone who can read and write. His wow line was supposed to be, "Sour-cheese la foam." The gag here is that his French is rudimentary and he thinks he is saying "Cher-chez la femme."

A Few New Lows.

Inasmuch as those are high spots in Mr. Levinson's comedy, you can imagine what the low spots are. The real laugh of the show is to be found in the list of credits in the program. There we learn that Mr. Levinson derived his book from "an original story by Alfred Gruenwald and Geza Herzog."

So, it took two authors to write the story? It could have been written in these words: Johann Strauss was persuaded by an American promoter to play his waltzes at the Peace Jubilee in Boston in 1872, at a fee of $100,000. Strauss is besieged by the bobby-soxers of the day and snared into a love affair by a Beacon Hill society dame; Strauss cables his wife to come over and rescue him, because his contract forbids disclosure that he is married. She does, and the society dame is restored to her fiance.

The sets by Stuart Chaney are only fair. The costumes by Walter Florell (whose name, for some reason, is in bold face, whereas all the other names except Mr. Stolz's, in the credit list, are in light face) are garish and absurd, without being funny. George Balanchine did the choreography, which was saved by young Lang, who is good but not as good as the noisy claque last night would leave one to believe. Felix Brentano, the producer, as director, got the players on and off the stage without any mishap but with very little liveliness or design, either.

NEW YORK POST
SEPTEMBER 7, 1945

'Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston' Opens New Broadway Season

By Wilella Waldorf

"Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston," the new "romantic comedy with music" which opened the Broadway season last night at the Century Theatre, is produced by Felix Brentano. Robert Stolz not only conducts but has supplied the score, including arrangements of some popular Johann Strauss waltzes. The choreography is by George Balanchine, and one of the principal singers is Virginia MacWatters.

Add this up and it sounds as if another "Rosalinda" might be with us. But don't get excited. It isn't. "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" tries to be so many things at once that it never quite succeeds in being anything to speak of.

Just as you think it's settling down into the dear old Viennese operetta groove, it turns into a cheap vaudeville show, and when you're finally beginning to be able to bear the jokes, it shifts to the Whitneys of Beacon Hill back in the quaint old days of '72. Finally there's a dash of more or less modern musical comedy. Mr. Stolz has even composed a rhumba), and once or twice the stage is handed over to Miss MacWatters, who sidles out in one of her bustles to turn on an excellent coloratura soprano and add a Town Hall concert touch to the occasion.

Some Strauss Waltzes

Miss MacWatters' singing of the Strauss numbers is certainly the high-light of "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" and it is upon her top notes and the dancing of the ballet led by Harold Lang that "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" leans heavily for the approval of its audience, for although the plot has to do with the visit of Johann Strauss the Younger to Boston in 1872 to conduct an enormous concert during the Peace Jubilee, there is surprisingly little Viennese gaiety and spirit in the play.

Miss MacWatters, though a brilliant coloratura, often appears uncomfortable in her bustles, and her performance, apart from her capable singing, has a certain amateurish quality that Mr. Brentano's fussy direction does little to relieve.

But the chief difficulty lies in the fact that George Rigaud, the South American film actor chosen to portray Johann Strauss, never succeeds in conveying the slightest suspicion that he ever heard of Vienna. Since Mr. Rigaud does not sing at all, and his acting is routine, he was apparently chosen for his romantic mien. He kept reminding us of Gary Cooper. Mr. Cooper, we are convinced, would have seemed more Viennese than Mr. Rigaud, even if he had decided to wear cowboy clothes.

Although some of the musical arrangements are very pleasant, there seemed to be a conspiracy afoot last night to keep Vienna out of it. Florence Sundstrom, who plays Pepi, a girl from Johann's home town, is brassy Broadway, and while Ruth Matteson lends a professional quality and charm to the role of Mrs. Strauss, her style is far from Continental.

Feeble Humor

Jay Martin, a personable young man with a nice voice, sings attractively when given a chance, and Ralph Dumke and Edward J. Lambert, as Strauss's American managers, struggle gamely with some dismal comedy.

"This is my coming out dress," says Miss Sundstrom.

"That's right," Dumke quips. "You're certainly coming out of it."

So it went until around 11 o'clock. At one point, in the Whitney drawing room, Mr. Dumke harnessed a bevy of Beacon Hill society women in ribbons and drove them off the stage.

'MR. STRAUSS GOES TO BOSTON.'

Play with music, with score by Robert Stolz; lyrics by Robert Sour; book by Leonard L. Levinson, based on an original story by Alfred Grunswald and Geza Herczeg; choreography by George Balanchine; production designed by Stewart Chaney; costumes by Walter Florell; conductor, Robert Stolz; production staged by Felix Brentano; presented by Mr. Brentano at the Century Theater September 6, 1945. The cast:

Dapper Dan Pepper	Ralph Dumke
Policeman McGillicudy	Brian O'Mara
Inspector Gogarty	Don Fleer
First Reporter	Dennis Dengate
Second Reporter	Larry Gilbert
Third Reporter	Joseph Monte
Pepi	Florence Sundstrom
Bolibop	Frank Fina
Johann Strauss	George Rigaud
Klose Tilt	Edward J. Lambert
Hotel Manager	Lee Edwards
Brook Whitney	Virginia MacWatters
A Waiter	Paul Mario
Mrs. Dexter	Lelyia Tesen
Mrs. Blakely	Rosa Perfect
Mr. Whitney	Sydney Grant
Mrs. Taylor	Arlene Dahl
Mrs. Hastings	Selma Felton
Mrs. Iverson	Mario Barova
Mrs. Byrd	Cecile Sherman
Butler	John Oliver
Tom Avery	Jay Martin
A Photographer	John Harrold
Earl	Brian O'Mara
Hetty Strauss	Ruth Matteson
Aid to President	Lee Edwards
President Grant	Norman Roland
Mr. Pettinger	Don Fleer
Man in Overalls	Paul Mario
Solo Dancers	Harold Lang, Bobo Heath, Margit Dekova

Finally, when everybody, even President Ulysses S. Grant, was celebrating the Fourth of July on the bank of the Charles River (Stewart Chaney's best set of the evening), Mr. Rigaud wore full evening dress (white tie and tails) with the rest of the cast in sports clothes or big plumed hats and the inevitable bustles.

All a trifle confusing, but pleasant to listen to now and then.

NEW YORK PM
SEPTEMBER 7, 1945

Kronenberger

He Shoulda Stood in Vienna

PM Reviews

The new season started off last night, pretty much on all fours. Mr. Brentano has produced a large-scale operetta about Johann Strauss in America, and in view of Johann Strauss' music, such a project might very well have its points. But Mr. Brentano and his colleagues seem to have operated on the theory that Strauss was famous for his wit rather than his waltzes, and have offered many more samples of his talk than of his tunes. That is the show's first mistake, since away from the bandstand or his writing table Johann wasn't much of a glamour boy; and Robert Stolz, despite his own Viennese credentials, hasn't done anything at all exciting in the way of a score. The show's second and far more serious mistake is that classic one of operettas—a dreadful book. This one is really dreadful, a sort of dark brown fog through which *Mr. Strauss* tries to fight its way, and fails.

It would be a tough fight at best, but it's all the more a losing one because the show hasn't a great deal to fight with. The nice things about it are never more than nice. There is Virginia MacWatters' coloratura voice, which does very well with tunes by both Strauss and Stolz; but Miss MacWatters lacks personality, and remains a singer rather than a heroine. There is George Balanchine's choreography which, being Balanchine's, is graceful enough; but it is quite without the freshness and distinction of his best work. There is Harold Lang's dancing, which is the one enlivening thing in the show; but it's all rather alike and not the *Fancy Free* kind of thing he seems best at. The Stolz music is agreeable enough, but nothing more; the only romantic tune that has much body, *Into the Night*, strongly suggested to me *Begin the Beguine;* while the light ditties had no great snap, and got no particular help from Mr. Sour's lyrics. If the latter were now and then ingenious, they were also, now and then, deplorable: witness

It's practically uncanny
What's been happening to my
—Frances.

* * *

As for the book, or let's call it the plot, it tells of Strauss coming to America in 1872 to conduct the music at the Boston Jubilee. With an eye to fetching the ladies, Strauss' impresario gives out that the Waltz King is a bachelor, and a Boston society belle promptly falls head over heels in love with him. That's all that Boston—which thinks the waltz is immoral, to begin with—needs to cook up trouble; and in the midst of these intensities, Strauss' wife arrives from Vienna. By that time I wouldn't have cared if Franz Joseph had arrived from Vienna and the show had turned into *Marinka*. George Rigaud (as Strauss), Ralph Dumke, Ruth Matteson and various others were pretty well stranded by the proceedings. Nor, in the midst of the general dullness, was there much beyond Miss Matteson's looks to take the eye. Only Stewart Chaney's final set has any pictorial value; and the costumes, unlike those in most period musicals, are not very attractive. —Louis Kronenberger

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

SEPTEMBER 7, 1945

'Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston' Dull Operetta About Schwaltz King

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The long-expected theatrical season of 1945-46 opened last night with a dull thud when Felix Brentano presented "a romantic comedy with music" at the Century Theatre under the title of "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston."

People, including this observer, were very glad to be going to the theatre again and to see their beloved first-night friends. A happy chorus of "Hello, darling, how are you?" set the auditorium abuzz before the curtain went up, and everybody walking down the aisle who saw a darling already seated four places away from the aisle had to reach over and clasp hands. This rather mussed up the three strangers sitting nearest the aisle, but it was all very loving and everybody was just darling and now we are going to have to settle down to a whole new season of this horseradish.

Unhappily for all of us darlings, "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" is an uninspired, solemn, hesitant and ill-routined specimen of operetta. It comes alive once or twice—as when Virginia MacWatters is giving the coloratura treatment to "Laughing-Waltz" or Ruth Matteson is singing, quite simply, a number titled "Going Back Home." But once or twice is not enough—even for an operetta.

Exciting Idea.

The idea of the show is exciting enough: Johann Strauss Jr., the waltz king, is hired in 1872 to tour America conducting orchestras; and when he hits the Boston Jubilee everybody in Boston goes crazy. The girls shriek and swoon just as they do today over F. Sinatra—only instead of wearing bobby socks they are clad in bustles which make them look like ostriches in an air-raid shelter.

But, alackaday, not much happens. The scenes by Stewart Chaney change once in a while, and Mr. Strauss gets a little dizzy over a young Boston dish, and Mrs. Strauss pursues him from Vienna and leads him back into the path of righteousness, and always the girls are wearing those bustles.

The costumes are by Walter Florell, the Hollywood hatter, and I think that Mr. Florell, in addition to mixing his colors rather unattractively, thought it would be fetching to design a hat for every girl's behind. This is the wrong place for hats.

Stolz Conducts.

Robert Stolz, respected practitioner of the waltz ("Two Hearts in Waltz Time"), has made the score for "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston." In addition to some nice adaptations of Johann's familiar delights he has supplied some melodies of his own and they are always pleasing and upon occasion delightful. They also seem familiar. Mr. Stolz, a muscular, baldish gentleman, conducts his own score and his orchestra is crisp and well-schooled.

As Mr. Strauss, George Rigaud is amiable but not startling. We get him from French movies and he has made a film or two in Hollywood. I have already paid my respects to Miss MacWatters. Ralph Dumke has too little funny material to work with in the Barnumesque role of the impresario who engineered Strauss' American tour. The one I really like is Miss Matteson, as Mrs. Strauss.

That noted Muscovite, George Balanchine, has staged the dances, and it is odd that the Russian treatment does not enhance the Viennese style of music. A very capable lad, Harold Lang, dances some Strauss numbers with a girl—but does them as though they were Cossack stomps.

Well, anyway, here we are again. Hello, darling.

New York Journal-American

Sept. 7, 1945

'Mr. Strauss' Bows At the New Century

By ROBERT GARLAND

After two weeks, or three, in the city of the title, "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" came last night to Manhattan, displaying its songs, its story and its dances up on the stage of the New Century, formerly the Old Jolson, Theatre. By so doing, it opened the Broadway season of 1945-46, a season which, I hope to goodness, will get better as it goes along. Frankly, this "romantic comedy with music" is a brash be-bustled bore.

Along with the hopeful congregation foregathered up near Central Park, I wanted to like "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston." With songs by a Mr. Stolz and a Mr. Sour, with story by a Mr. Levinson, a Mr. Gruenwald and a Mr. Herczeg, and with dances by the Mr. Balanchine, I wanted to like "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" very much indeed. But all of Mr. Strauss's horses and all Mr. Strauss's men stirred not a stump to help me.

To the contrary. Mr. Stolz and Mr. Sour turned out songs that are mediocre. Mr. Levinson, Mr. Gruenwald and Mr. Herczeg turned out a story that is commonplace. And Mr. Balanchine, the Mr. Balanchine, turned out dances that are pedestrian. Even the production provided by Stewart Chaney is as unimaginative as the direction by the Felix Brentano who is also the producer.

* * *

Visiting Sinatra

This took a slew of doing. Let me remind you that the adventures and misadventures of Mr. Strauss—Johann Strauss, mind you, the handsome Waltz King from Vienna!—in the Boston of 1872 were truly fabulous. Conducting a makeshift orchestra so vast he couldn't see the end of it, an orchestra in which 100 visiting firemen beat the brains out of "Il Trovatore" on 100 anvils, an orchestra made up of——

But it wasn't just the orchestra! As far as those rockbound New Englanders were concerned, Johann Strauss was the Frank Sinatra of their day and generation. Cabots worshipped the ground he walked on. Lodges swooned at the mention of his name. All this, and a great deal more, could have been gotten into the libretto of last night's season-opener at the Century. But none of this has been gotten into it. Not even into the music.

Instead, Mr. Levinson, relying on "an original story" by Mr. Gruenwald and Mr. Herczeg, has cooked up a trite and tiresome triangle of which Mr. Strauss is one side, Mrs. Strauss is another side and a lady known as Brook Whitney is the third. And the side which is Mr. Strauss is the least likely of the three. Why he ever went to Boston you'll never learn from me. He doesn't seem to know, either.

* * *

Music Derivitive

The only music I can remember is the music which derives directly from the composer of the title. That is to say, a march for the dancing girls, a couple of waltzes for the leading lady and a polka for the ensemble. "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston," "Who Knows?", "You Never Know What Comes Next" and "What's a Girl Supposed to Do," supplied by Mr. Stolz and Mr. Sour, are even now forgotten.

As for the principals, Virginia MacWatters walks off with such honors as the evening has to offer. Programs at the Century refer to her as "a pocket-size champion of the altitudinal note." You, in turn, may remember her as Adele in the New Opera Company's "Rosalinda" and as a recent soloist with the Philharmonic at the Lewisohn Stadium. She's a coloratura soprano. And one coloratura soprano goes a long way.

George Rigaud, as the Mr. Strauss who goes to Boston, is making his American stage debut. Better luck to America next time. Ralph Dumke, as Dapper Dan Pepper, remarks that "Oliver Wendell sang Holmes Sweet Holmes"—which gives you some idea! The scenery by Stewart Chaney, the costumes by Walter Florell and the ensemble by Actors Equity leave me flatly where they found me....

As far as I'm concerned, Mr. Strauss should have stood in Vienna.

NEW YORK TIMES
SEPTEMBER 7, 1945.

THE PLAY

BY LEWIS NICHOLS

Seldom has Back Bay seemed so remote as last evening, when "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" came up from there to the Century Theatre. Seldom has Mr. Strauss' Vienna seemed so remote either. For in celebrating the Waltz King's excursion to the local Athens, those connected with the fall season's first musical have offered neither good Americana, good European nostalgia—or, a good musical. Dragging down the evening is a book to punish even the most long suffering of the operatic faithful, and while the music is better than the words, it is not enough better to cover up the rest. "Mr. Strauss Goes To Boston" is one of those operettas which seem tired as well as old.

* * *

Based on the junior Strauss' visit to the World Peace Jubilee in 1872, the book leans heavily on the romantic angle. Whether history, fiction or no, it sends the Waltz King into a routine three-quarters time pursuit of one of the Whitneys of Boston, a pursuit terminated by the arrival of Mrs. S., who had taken a fast boat. Alfred Gruenwald and Geza Herczeg are credited with the original story; Leonard L. Levinson with the actual words. "I am homesick," remarks one of the characters. "I wish she were home, sick," replies another. The authors of the book have forgotten nothing they ever learned about old-fashioned operettas, and they have put everything they learned into this one.

Robert Stolz, who is a waltz king in his own right, is the composer of most of the music as well as the conductor of the orchestra. The composition expectations are five numbers duly credited to the Strausses, son and father. For his part, Mr. Stolz is not up to his days of "Two Hearts in Three-quarter Time," although one song, "Into the Night," is definitely singable, and other, "Who Knows?" is fair enough. The lyrics, by Robert Sour, are undistinguished, being of the school wherein "sin" rhymes with "gin." The music is not sent forth with enough lilt of grace.

* * *

Virginia MacWatters is the daughter of the Boston Whitneys; she has, of course, a good coloratura, although it was rendered a bit metallic part of last evening by the amplifying system. George Rigaud is Strauss, and perhaps not as easy in the part as he might be. To Ralph Dumke, as the manager of the trip, falls most of the operetta's forced comedy, and he can do little except deliver it as written. There are a good many dances by George Balanchine which will not change that gentleman's position in the theatre either way. Harold Lang is the chief dancer and a good one, but apparently in recognition of his virtues, the management has given him too much to do. To complete the indictment as quickly as possible, Stewart Chaney's settings are not his prize-winners and the Walter Florell costumes are forgotten too easily and soon.

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
SEPTEMBER 7, 1945

— *By* HOWARD BARNES —

Pedestrian

IT will be news when a new theatrical season gets off on the right foot. "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston," which opened at the Century Theater last evening, does not come under that heading. There are pleasant interludes in this romantic comedy with music, which celebrates the Waltz King's trip to this country in 1872. The Stewart Chaney settings and the George Balanchine choreography are well matched for a pretty period piece. Robert Stolz has interpolated Johann Strauss dreiviertel-takt with considerable cunning, particularly in the lovely song which Ruth Matteson sings, called "Going Back Home." Put it all together and you have no more than a shabbily pretentious entertainment.

* * *

The book is so bad that it is reasonably certain that embarrassment was felt behind the footlights as well as in front of them. It has something to do with a pin-up boy of his day who became mixed up with a Beacon Hill heiress until his wife arrived from Vienna and President Grant blew in from somewhere or other and got him back on an esthetic beam. It employs innumerable comic wheezes, but they are no aid to either the action or the levity. Since Felix Brentano, the producer-director of the show, has staged it in a random and ponderous fashion, it falls to pieces with a frightening acceleration.

* * *

The tunes are still good, whether they are mostly Strauss or mostly Stolz. They afford the happy moments when a brilliantly trained ballet chorus, led by Margit Dekova, whirls through fetching mid-Victorian Chaney settings and reminds one of the theater's exciting possibilities. For some strange reason the costumes by Walter Florell are as bad as they are good. The designer must have been napping a good deal of the time that "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" was in production.

* * *

There are good players at the Century, but few of them are given a chance to show their worth. George Rigaud is a handsome and talented leading man in the role of the title. Virginia MacWatters rips through coloratura passages, as the Boston blue-blood, with a fine disdain for high C, and Ralph Dumke, Florence Sundstrom and Edward J. Lambert struggle valiantly with gags which would have been dismissed in vaudeville back in 1872. It would be pleasant to report that the 1945-'46 season had opened with a genuine flourish. "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" is no better than a slight peep and an occasional shuffle.

++++++++++++++++++++++++

NEW YORK SUN
SEPTEMBER 7, 1945.

'Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston,' at Century, Gives Season Doleful Start.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Earth tremors in the vicinity of Seventh avenue and Central Park South last night were brought on by the simultaneous opening of the theatrical season and the Century Theater—"Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" has finally arrived. It's been a long time in coming and it is still far from being a satisfactory show.

The book is flat, the comedy feeble, the principals generally unexciting, and the Strauss music, as pleasant as it is, isn't sufficient to make a go of this production. The season starts dolefully. I fear that Felix Brentano's production is a costly mistake.

They call it a romantic comedy with music, the music consisting of original compositions by Robert Stolz and arrangements of the Strauss melodies by him and George Lessner. The librettist, Leonard L Levinson, has put together a book having to do with the visit of the waltz composer, Johann Strauss, to Boston at the time of the World Peace Jubilee in 1872 and he presents the complications and disturbances resulting from Johann's meeting with a pretty Boston debutante. The composer's attractive wife comes along from Vienna but the story flounders before and after her arrival and the evening's only worth while moments are when the production turns to song and dance.

George Rigaud, playing Johann, is a clumsy actor and Virginia MacWatters is quite too coy for my taste, but she is excellent vocally. Miss MacWatters does well indeed with "Who Knows?" and the Laughing-Waltz and the Coloratura Waltz. Ruth Matteson, quite lovely to look upon, has a nice number, "Going Back Home." The massive Ralph Dumke struggles with the book's painful comedy interludes, as do Edward J. Lambert and the sprightly Florence Sundstrom. There is some good dancing from Harold Lang, Babs Heath and Helen Gallagher and "The Gossip Polka" is a pleasant ensemble number.

Felix Brentano staged the production, and he is the man who did the trick with "Rosalinda" and "The Merry Widow." But this new piece at the Century never comes to life. Stewart Chaney has designed some fetching backgrounds and Walter Florell provided some attractive costumes. The choreography is George Balanchine's.

"Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston," for all the time and money given to it, comes forth as a stolid and spiritless show. The verdict on the season's first play is a vehement no.